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EAST TIMOR DIVIDES ASIAN CHRISTIANS

SEOUL 2 JULY

Debate on the issue of East Timor has sharply divided the Eighth Assembly of the Christian Conference of Asia and led to a decision by the Indonesian churches to withdraw from all committees of the Regional Conference of Churches and Christian Councils.

Some 300 Christians from throughout Asia attended the CCA Assembly in Seoul which ended on 2 July.

Distribution of newsletters on the situation in East Timor and the presence at the Assembly of East Timorese Roman Catholic Priest, Father Francisco Fernandes from Australia, led to intense debate. The Catholic Church is not a member of CCA. Fr Fernandes told an informal meeting of 80 people attending the Assembly that "my people depend on refugees like myself to lift the heavy batik blanket under which Indonesia has smothered them to give the outside world a glimpse of the true reality".

He said the Catholic Church in East Timor is "walking with the people" and appealed to the Assembly "to take up our cause with your churches and governments in the interests of achieving a just and lasting peace for my beloved people". He presented to the informal meeting a petition signed by 110 churches and Christian organisations in Asia, Australia and tne Pacific.

The Indonesian church representatives refused to share a platform with Fr Fernandes but gained the permission of the Assembly to read a statement in response. The Rev Arno Thobias of West Timor said he did not reject what had been said regarding East Timor but went on to question the integrity of the organising committee that allowed a person from East Timor to be present without their knowing it.

Dr Bert Supit of Sulawesi read a prepared statement that traced the history of East Timor and explained why Indonesia had stepped into "the power vacuum when the Portugese could not control the island".

"It is not true to speak about genocide in East Timor. The purpose of the Indonesian army is not to kill but to assist families to be reunited" he said.

Referring to the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) which represents 90% of the Protestant Churches, he said the PGI "stands for ending of confrontation and solving social problems and reconcilliation of families, clans and people. But this can only occur in the framework of the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia where diversity can be preserved within the unity of one nation".

An attempt to allow Fr Fernandes to respond was defeated by a four to one majority.

Earlier, during the three day on-off debate, the Rev Kunihiro Sato, Moderator of the National Christian Council of Japan, told a lunchtime gathering, "My country invaded many other countries in the 1940's. We people in Japan were completely under the control of information from our government. We did not know what was happening."

"This is a confession and a kind of advice not to follow our history. We Japanese delegates stood up on this issue of East Timor not to condemn, but because of our history" he said.

RUSSELL ROLLASON
Executive Director
Australian Council for Overseas Aid

2 July 1985

EAST TIMOR DIVIDES ASSEMBLY

Distribution of two leaflets calling for debate and action over the situation in East Timor sharply divided the Assembly in an hour of debate on the fourth day of the CCA Assembly (29 June). The leaflets were distributed by members of the CCA Youth Forum. One of the leaflets, the Youth Forum news-sheet 'Ham Seong' No 4, carried a front page story titled 'The People Who Never Smile'. It included a harsh cartoon depicting delegates departing for the CCA Assembly apparently ignoring the suffering and dying of the people of East Timor.

Mr Frans Tumiwa, of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia, objected to the distribution of the material on behalf of the Indonesian delegation to the Assembly and requested withdrawal of the material. After consideration of the request, the Steering Committee pointed out that the papers were not official documents of the Assembly and the views expressed had not been discussed by the Assembly. They left it to the Assembly to decide on the issue of withdrawal of the material.

Mr Abishenganaden of the NCC Singapore, opened the debate saying the material should be withdrawn and expunged from any record of the Assembly. The Rev David Gill of the Uniting Church in Australia, supported the call for withdrawal of the material. He pointed out that the 'Ham Seong' article "implies that the Uniting Church in Australia has endorsed the document which we have not seen and have not endorsed". He also said he was embarrassed as an Australian that the second leaflet, which was published in Australia, by Christians in Solidarity with East Timor, implied that the Australian delegation supported the views contained in it. "I recognise that the issue of East Timor is a major concern, but I'm not convinced that the language of confrontation is the best way for the churches to address the issue" he said.

Mr Jesudas Athialy of the Marthoma Church, India pointed out that no one had challenged what had been written in the documents about the situation in East Timor. "Amnesty International, Red Cross and many other international organisations have spoken out over this issue. It will be a sad day if the CCA fails to rise to its prophetic role" he said.

The call for discussion on the issue within the CCA was supported by Bishop Robert Longid of the Episcopal Church in the Philippines who said: "part of the history of CCA is that we listen to both sides. If we talk about justice, CCA must listen to both sides and we should create a forum to do so".

In response to the call for a debate, the Rev Nico Radjawane of the GPM Church, Indonesia said he would be sorry if the East Timor issue was to be discussed as the Communion of Churches in Indonesia had not been invited to prepare information on the situation. Referring to the Niles Memorial Lecutre by Dr Dharmaputera, he reminded people that limits apply to the Indonesian Churches but the churches "are struggling with the issue of East Timor and Irian Jaya".

Mr Fructuoso Sabug of the NCC Philippines responded saying the issue is not the documents, but the issue of East Timor: "Why are the Indonesian Churches so afraid of this issue?" he asked. "We must find a forum to discuss the issue."

The Indonesian view was reiterated by Dr Bert Supit of GMIM Church, Indonesia expressing deep concern at the insulting nature of the cartoon, "I see myself as this fat person attending CCA, leaving my brothers dying at home. I feel oppressed, being dominated at this Assembly by a certain idea" he said.

The debate closed with the Assembly agreeing that "the paper of CCA Youth Forum No 4 is not an official document of the CCA Assembly and the views stated in the document were not discussed or cleared through this Assembly and that it should be withdrawn".

Youth response

The Youth Forum's response, an editorial in the Monday edition of 'Ham Seong', accused the Assembly of a heresy of good ecumenical relations." "This involves keeping smooth and tidy relations between ecumenical bureaucracies and between churches while relagating issues of injustice to occasional consultations ... or simply sweeping them under the mat" states the Editorial.

Referring to their front page story on Saturday, 'Ham Seong' said the list of churches, councils of churches and other church groups, "adds up to a considerable groundswell of ecumenical opinion".

Whilst indicating "no personal offense was intended" the 'Ham Seong' editorial went on to charge that the Assembly's failure to address the East Timor question was "a dark stain on the conscience of the Asian Churches".

The Youth Forum called for CCA International Affairs to hold a consultation on East Timor at which all sides can be represented, and looked "forward to a healthier process for dealing with this issue in the future".

East Timor Visitor

Meanwhile, East Timor Catholic priest, Father Francisco Fernandes still waits for an opportunity to speak to the delegates. "I risked my life in order to get here to speak on behalf of my people" he told a lunchtime gathering of friends. "I'm not here to accuse or blame anyone, but simply to voice the suffering of my people and my country" he said.

The Rev Kunihiro Sato, Moderator of the NCC, Japan told the lunchtime gathering "My country invaded many other countries in the 1940's. We people in Japan were completely under the control of information from our government. We did not know what was happening".

"This is a confession from me and a kind of advice not to follow our history. We Japanese delegates stood up on this issue not to condemn but because of our history" he said.

This story has not been published or submitted for publication.
The material enclosed is available for use.

Russell Rollason

Christian Conference of Asia
Eighth Assembly
June 26 – July 2 1985
Seoul
No 5
2 July

INDONESIAN CHURCHES SHOCK ASSEMBLY

In an unexpected action, the Indonesian Churches announced to a surprised Assembly on the second last day that they had decided not to participate in the decision making in CCA for the next five years.

Announcing the decision, the Rev. Ms. Augustina Lumentut requested her name be removed from the proposed list of names for the General Committee and explained the reasons for the Indonesian decision.

"The Indonesian delegation has come to the situation where we could not help feeling that we, as Churches in Asia, are being pushed to conduct our business in the Assembly in such a way that we lose our uniqueness of being church" she explained. Ms Lumentut stressed that the decision was not to be interpreted as Indonesia withdrawing from participation in the CCA.

"We have decided we should continue our support of the program of the CCA" she said.

"By allowing us to be absent from the decision making bodies you help us in our efforts to understand ourselves better and in what way we are lacking in our participation in CCA" she told the silent Assembly.

Explaining the action, Dr. Bert Supit, another Indonesian delegate said the attempt of our Churches to express their role and responsibilities in Indonesia and in Asia have not be understood. "We are probably quite far from you" he said.

"We hope we can find the spirit that has wandered within the CCA since Prapat" he continued. "We tried hard to find the spiri but believe this spirit is fading away."

"Some of the discussions in the past days, particularly yesterday (East Timor -Ed)have strengthened our concerns" he said. "Forgiv us, we will not withdraw from CCA" he concluded.

The Rev. Oh Jae Shik of Korea responded a appealed to "our sisters and brothers in Indonesia to share information on their concerns".

"I plead to the Assembly that this matter be taken seriously so our hearts may be clea before we leave this plenary session" he said

The Rev. Ron O'Grady, representing the New Zealand Churches of Christ acknowledged that CCA had changed since Prapat. (CCA was founded in Prapat, Indonesia in 1957. It was known as the East Asia Conference of Churches (EACC .) Ed), but the style is same even though the agenda has changed". "The structures are not adequate to deal with the issues that arise" he said. "We must look for a structure where we can work together and preserve our unity" he said.

The Rev. David Gill of Australia, added his plea for Indonesia to reconsider. "We feel our fellowship will be greatly impoverished if you take this action" he said.

Retiring General Secretary, Dr.Yap Kim Hao also appealed to Indonesia to give further

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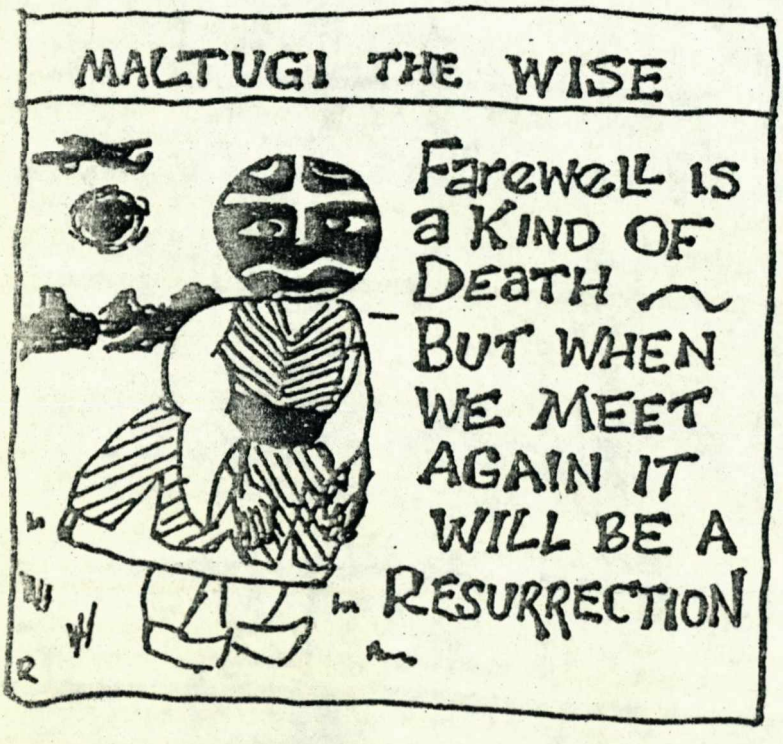


...TURAL NIGHT ENDS ...TH RIOT POLICE

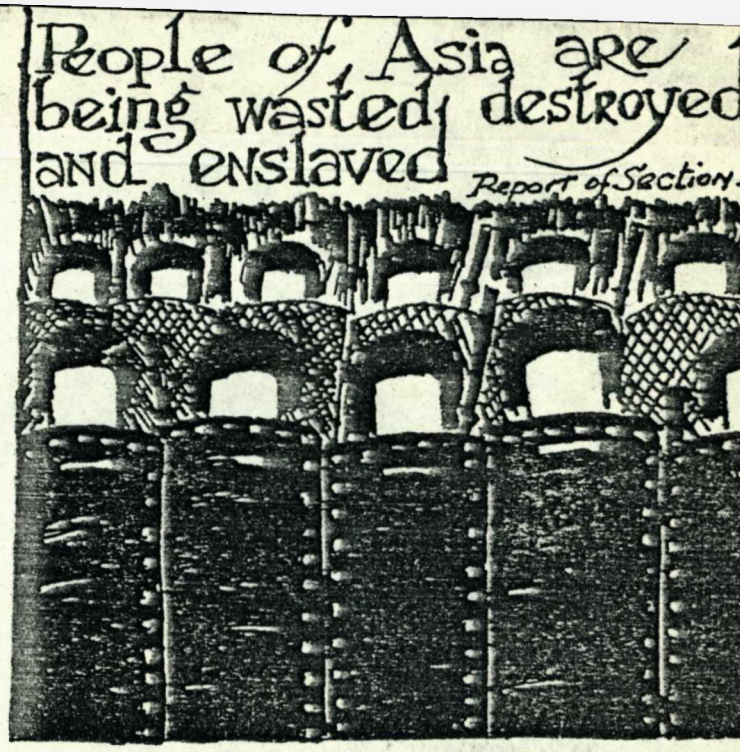
Delegates to the 8th Assembly of the CCA had to pass through lines of fully equipped riot police as they left a cultural evening at the Ehwa Girls' High School in downtown Seoul on Sunday evening. The cultural evening, which included traditional Korea songs and music as well as a Minjung play recounting the recent history of the Korean people's struggles, followed a Festival of Faith addressed by World Council of Churches General Secretary the Rev Dr Emilio Castro.

During the two hour cultural program, some 500 combat police plus numerous other plain clothes police formed up in the streets surroundings the Girls' High School. The performers in the cultural evening and many of the audience were youth, students and labour movement members who had been involved in protest against the forcible break-up by police on the previous morning of a hunger strike wokers at the Daewoo Apparel factory.

As the performers left the memorial hall they began a protest in the sports arena at the high school. The group was protesting the police action at Daewoo Apparel and the Government's continuing use of violence against people seeking charge.

As the youth and students formed up to march to the nearby police station to protest, a burning cross was lit. "The burning cross is a symbol of the suffering Christ and the suffering people of Korea", explained a Korean observer.

Six of the students and workers were arrested at the gate of the high school but were later released on the condition that the demonstration end. The demonstration ended around 11pm. During the confrontation, a tear gas cannister was exploded in the street outside the school.



When Dr Castro told the delegates "Christians in Korea are in the midst of conflict situations" he perhaps did not expect the Korean authorities to illustrate his point so graphically.

Indonesian Shock Con't

consideration but conceded that "certain circumstances have precipitated what has been smouldering for a long time and I have sought to interpret their feelings to CCA".

The discussion ended when the Assembly granted permission for the Rev. Lumentut to withdraw her name and the General Committee was elected with a vacancy for an Indonesian representative.

1990 1990 1990 199

It appears the ecumenical millenium may dawn in Asia in 1990.

As a result of a decision at this Assembl the 9th CCA Assembly will have to be held in 1990. The Indonesian Churches have already invited CCA to meet in Indonesia.

The Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches is also scheduled for 1990 and the two potential host countries are, reportedly, Korea and Australia.

FAREWELL

from the staff of ASSEMBLY NEWS
Alice Santhira
Domini Suarez
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Keith Ludgater
Russell Rollason

and all our helpers especially the typists & collators

EAST TIMOR

After three days of debate charged with emotion and concern, some 80 people attending the CCA Assembly listened to Fast Timorese Catholic Priest Father Fransisco Fernandes describe the situation in his war torn country.

"I am deeply conscious of my responsibility to my people who are one of the few oppressed peoples in the world to be persistently denied the freedom to speak for themsevles," he began.

In his 8 page statement, Fr. Fernandes briefly related the history of the struggle in East Timor and critically analysed the four justifications given by Indonesia for its forced takeover of East Timor in 1975.

"Since 1975, between 100,000 and 200,000, that is between 1 in 6 and 1 in 3 of the population, have died as a result of Indonesian military activity and associated factors such as famine" he said.

Father Fernandes quoted the Washington based Centre for Defence Information as having reported in 1983 that East Timor was one of the longest running and most violent of the 40 conflicts then raging in the world. "Only in Kampuchea and possibly Afghanistan had more people died", said the centre.

"In 1976 General Benny Murdani (head of the Indonesia Armed forces) predicted confidently it would take 3 weeks to subdue East Timor" said Fr. Fernandes. "Yet it still maintains some 10,000 troops in East Timor, backed by helicopters, tanks and OV-10 counter insurgency aircraft" he said.

But perhaps the most significant non-military expression of resistance comes from the church in East Timor.

The Catholic Church, to which some 80% of the people chose to say they belonged in their responses to the Indonesian census of 1980, is 'walking with the people', to use the words of a Timorese layman. Its network of missions keeps it well-informed about events and attitudes. What it says, then, should be listened to closely for it faithfully reflects the mind of the mass of the East Timorese.

The Church's principal pastor and spokesperson, Mgr Belo, is very clear

What we want, he is saying, are the following :-

1. an end to hostilities;
2. the withdrawal of Indonesian troops;
3. respect for the culture, religion and identity of the Timorese people;
4. a non-violent, diplomatic solution based on the right of the people to self-determination;
5. negotations between the Timorese people, including Fretilin, and Indonesia.

Father Fernandes concluded with an appeal to the CCA and the Churches of Asia

"Just as the people of East Timor have turned to the local Church, now the Church of East Timor itself looks to the international Church for support in its lonely and difficult struggle to be faithful - both to the Gospel and its people. We are blood brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. On this basis, and on this basis alone, I appeal to you to take up our cause with your Churches and Governments in the interests of achieving a just and lasting peace for my beloved people."

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